State of Idaho

DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The newest Medicare fraud scheme:

"Free help for back pain"

BOISE ID (April 1, 2011) – Scam artists out to steal taxpayer dollars from the federal health care system are targeting Medicare beneficiaries by telephone and offering free back or leg braces. The Idaho Department of Insurance reminds consumers that conversations about devices of this kind should be instigated by a primary care physician, not a telephone solicitor.

The call could go something like this: "Do you have back pain? If so, you may be eligible for a free Medicare-approved back brace. And while you are getting the back brace, we will also send you a free leg brace." Scam artists offer a number of free devices or services in exchange for the consumer's Medicare number.

Jacquie Kennedy-Gooch, Coordinator of the Department's Senior Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA) office says, "Never give your Medicare number to strangers, including people at health fairs providing 'free' services such as toenail clipping, eye exams, blood pressure and cholesterol checks and diabetic shoes."

Kennedy-Gooch urges consumers not to accept free items or services from strangers who make unsolicited telephone calls or visits. Medicare summary notices should be carefully reviewed for any suspicious charges or items that have been double-billed.

SHIBA works to educate beneficiaries about Medicare fraud and abuse. Idaho residents are encouraged to report any suspected fraud to SHIBA at 1-800-247-4422.

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